

## **FFRWDGRECH**

<b>Ref No</b>	<b>PGW (Po) 17 (POW)</b>
<b>OS Map</b>	160
<b>Grid Ref</b>	SO 029 271
<b>Former County</b>	Powys
<b>Unitary Authority</b>	Brecknock
<b>Community Council</b>	Glyn Tarell
<b>Designations</b>	Listed building: Ffrwdgrech House Grade II; Stable block Grade II
<b>Site Evaluation</b>	<b>II</b>

**Primary reasons for grading** A well preserved example of a Victorian pleasure ground with exceptionally fine tree planting. It includes a picturesque dingle and is set in a magnificent situation at the foot of the Brecon Beacons, the landscaping being contrived to give fine views to the hills.

**Type of Site** Small park; Victorian pleasure grounds and kitchen garden

**Main Phases of Construction** c. 1828; 1880s-90s

### **SITE DESCRIPTION**

Ffrwdgrech is a substantial country house situated in a secluded and peaceful situation on the northern fringe of the Brecon Beacons a short distance to the south of the town of Brecon. The drive runs southwards off a minor road, rising up gently to a gravel forecourt on the north side of the house.

Ffrwdgrech is a two-storey classical house, elongated east-west, with rendered and rough-cast stone and brick walls, sash windows, shallowly pitched slate roof and deep eaves. The original core of the house is the eastern end, which has projecting gable pediments on the north and south sides and rendered over false ground-floor windows on the north and east. In the centre of the north side of this part of the house is a classical porch of Bath stone, with paired, unfluted Ionic columns flanking the main entrance. The remainder of the house, to the west, was added later in the Victorian period. It is of two and three storeys, the windows plainer than the earlier ones. On the south side is a small verandah on iron columns. To the west is a small, separate house contemporary with the western end of the main house.

Ffrwdgrech was built on a virgin site in c. 1828 by . The architect was Robert Lugar, the design being in his pattern book, a mirror image of that for Yaxham Rectory, Norfolk,

of the same date. In the 1880s the property, which then extended to 6000 acres, was bought by David Evans, a banker with Wilkins Bank in Brecon. He had nine children and built a huge servants' wing to the west of the existing house, thus more than doubling its size. A dairy, now gone, stood to the west, between the house and the smaller, now separate one.

To the west of the house are two well preserved stable courts, both with cobbled yards. The northern court is open on the east, with widely spaced stone piers forming the entrance at the north-east end. It has a two-storey house, Stable House, dating to the 1880s-90s, along its north side. On the west and south sides are stone stable ranges with dressed stone and blue brick dressings. The west coach house range was converted into a garage in the early twentieth century. In front, in the north-west corner, is a late Victorian coach wash area with a glazed roof on cast iron columns. The cobbling continues to the south, enclosed on the east by a well built stone wall, against which is a small lean-to stone building which once housed machinery for making methane gas (electricity only arrived here in the 1950s). Along the outside of the wall is a wavy hedge of *Thuja plicata*, which dates to before 1933, when it is shown on an estate map. The second court, to the south of the first, is entered through a wide archway in its east range. It is open on its west side, where there is a revetment wall and drop to a track leading southwards to the farm. Next to this is a small stone pigsty with its original stone slate roof. The upper floors of the ranges in this yard have circular windows. Many of the internal fittings survive. The stable courts are contemporary with the original house of c. 1828, with details such as the blue brickwork added in the 1880s-90s.

The small park stretches north, east and south from the house, the ground rising gently to the south and more steeply to the east, culminating in the large plantation of Held Wood. A long sloping area of pasture runs south from the garden, divided from it by a ha-ha. The grassland is flanked by plantations, mainly coniferous, which frame the fine view of the Beacons. To the south-east is a large coniferous clump, Quarry Wood, fronted by mature specimen trees, including a very tall (over 124 ft) silver fir (*Abies alba*). The east side of the park is entirely occupied by Held Wood, a commercially run woodland divided into 25 blocks of various coniferous species, including western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) and Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*). To the north of the grounds is an area of open grassland, sloping to the west, planted with some ornamental trees. There are several groups of Scots pines and a few individual deciduous trees, including a copper beech. The character of the large field to the west of the road, which now bounds the parkland, suggests that it too was once part of the park. It has isolated deciduous trees within it and is bounded on the road side by iron park railings.

The park was created in c. 1828, when the house was built. Its configuration has been little altered since. When the property was bought in the 1880s by David Evans a large programme of tree planting was implemented, both in the park and in the grounds. There was then, and has been ever since, a strong emphasis on American conifers and these have proved to grow well here. The park is now notable for its stands of conifers, in particular Douglas firs and western red cedars.

The grounds can be divided into two main areas: to the south of the house is an open area of lawn and pond; to the north and east of the house is the wooded valley that has been ornamentally laid out and planted. These complement each other very well, the one

providing a foreground to the park and magnificent scenery beyond, the other providing enclosed, picturesque walks.

The entrance to the grounds is off a small lane to the north of the house. It is flanked by low, incurving rubble stone walls, topped by iron railings, which continue along the front of the lodge's garden on the south. On either side of the entrance are square stone gate piers carved with a chequerboard pattern and with heavy, overhanging, tapered tops. The gate is wooden. To the south of the entrance is a small, two-storey lodge in nineteenth-century gothic style. It is built of stone, with a slate roof and central chimney and appears contemporary with the house. The tarmac drive passes over a curving stone bridge with iron railing parapets and winds southwards up the small wooded valley which runs south-east/north-west along the east side of the grounds. Oaks and beech trees line the drive and the mixed woodland is underplanted with rhododendrons and other shrubs. The drive then crosses a sloping lawn and arrives at a gravel forecourt in front of the house.

To the south of the house, which has a strip of flagstones along its east and south sides, a large lawn slopes gently down to a stone-edged pond. Part of the lawn is levelled and was formerly used as tennis courts. A further grass court lay to the south of the pond; this is no longer mown. Fringing the south side of the pond is a bank of hybrid rhododendrons, azaleas and maples, planted in the Edwardian period. The garden is bounded on the south by a stone ha-ha. The pond is fed by water from a spring in Quarry Wood and on its west side is a well built stone sluice, leading overflow water into a stone-lined channel down to the Nant Gwydi stream. The garden is bounded on the west by a stone revetment wall, below which is a lane leading to the farm.

The lawn continues around the east and north sides of the house. To the east is a mound which marks the position of a large sycamore tree. Beyond are some large specimen trees, including silver firs (*Abies alba*), Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*), oak and lime. The oak is planted on a mound, as are some trees on the north lawn, indicating a Victorian date of planting, as this was a fashionable practice at that time. To the north-east the lawn slopes down to the valley and at its foot are some fine specimen trees, including oak, aspen, Turkey oak and lime, with rhododendrons and azaleas beneath them.

The valley is largely wooded, planted with many ornamental and woodland trees and shrubs. To the east of the house unsurfaced picturesque paths have been laid out to give circular walks at various levels of the valley, known as the dingle. Numerous fine specimen trees, planted in the nineteenth century, ornament this area. The oldest, probably planted when the house was built and the grounds laid out in the 1830s, are beech, ash and horse chestnut. Others, planted at the end of the century, include silver fir (*Abies alba*), Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*), Californian redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*), western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*), swamp cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*), birch, rowan, Japanese maple. Bamboos and *Gunnera manicata* are planted by the stream. Next to the paths are some old yews and box bushes.

The paths wind up to a highly picturesque series of waterfalls, where the stream falls over several exposed rock strata. Some of the falls have been artificially enhanced by diverting the stream with large boulders or by cutting grooves in the rock over which the

water falls. The romantic atmosphere is enhanced by trailing ivy, moss, laurels and many ferns, including some rare ones. The highest path crosses the valley above the top waterfall and the lowest path crosses just above the bottom fall. Both cross over simple, modern, wooden bridges that replace older wooden ones. Below the lowest fall is a huge horse chestnut. The upper path on the east side of the valley is flanked for a stretch by fine, tall western hemlock trees. The lower path on this side runs past a natural rock face. Lower down the valley the upper path is flanked on this side by a straight drainage gully, faced on the near side by a stone revetment wall. Beyond is a plantation of Norway spruce and Sitka spruce. At the lower end of this part of the valley is a small pond, in which a swamp cypress is growing, a clump of bamboos and an area of recently planted trees and shrubs, including maple, cherry and species brooms.

Opposite the house, at the foot of the north lawn, winding paths lead to a small wooden bridge over the stream and a flight of stone steps the other side, which lead to a small triangular lawn next to the west wall of the kitchen garden. In the centre of this is a stone sundial. The lower part of its pedestal is fluted, the upper part has four faces, each with a carved ram's head on it. The gnomon is still in place, although loose. Along the foot of the west wall of the kitchen garden is a 100 yard long herbaceous border.

The pleasure grounds were first laid out at the same time as the house was built, in c. 1828. In the 1880s-90s they were embellished with much ornamental tree planting, especially in the valley. In the Edwardian period many rhododendrons and azaleas were also planted. A 1933 plan of the gardens shows the layout more or less as it is now. The only feature shown then that has now gone is a summerhouse that stood on the edge of the valley, to the east of the house. This was a rustic, Scandinavian-style building of birch wood. The valley to its north was less planted than now, and the area to the west of the kitchen garden was slightly differently organised, with a rose garden where the lawn now is. Areas of planting are marked on the map. In the valley these include dogwood, azaleas, rhododendrons and 'heath'. Some individual trees are also labelled. At the north end of the lawn a 'hut' is marked, but this no longer exists.

The square, 2.2 acre kitchen garden lies to the north-east of the house, on the far side of the valley. Although now largely abandoned it is not too overgrown and its stone and brick walls are remarkably well preserved and of high quality. The west wall, in particular, is exceptionally fine, standing to c. 4 m, built of roughly coursed stone, topped by stone coping, on the outside and brick on the inside. The south wall is of both stone and brick and is slightly lower; its inside is rendered. The east wall is similar and the north wall has a higher section in the middle. Neither are rendered. Each side has a brick round arched doorway.

The interior is largely abandoned. Some trees have been planted in part of it and a few old fruit trees survive. The stone edging of paths and beds is visible in places, but otherwise the layout has gone. A large glasshouse, now abandoned and without its glass, stands along the north wall. It is on slightly raised ground, reached by a flight of stone steps at its west end. Its wooden framework, of western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) survives remarkably intact. The inside is overgrown. At the west end a round arched doorway leads into the potting shed, with the apple store to its east. These are part of a long range of stone lean-to bothies along the outside of the north wall. They are extremely well preserved, retaining all their interior fittings, including shelving in the

apple store, and many original tools. Two houses stand beyond. The Garden House is a plain late Victorian house, presumably the head gardener's house. The Bothy is situated on lower ground to the west. It is a small, square, single-storey house with a gothic door and a central chimney. It appears contemporary with the main house and was probably the original head gardener's house. From here a back drive runs north-westwards to join the lane just to the north of the main entrance.

The kitchen garden is contemporary with the house, dating to c. 1828. The glasshouse, shown on the 1933 map, was probably built using timber from the estate. The map shows two further, smaller glasshouses to the west, but these have gone.

## **Sources**

### **Primary**

1933 plan of the gardens. Private collection

### **Secondary**

Hyde, H.A., and S.G. Harrison, Welsh timber trees (1977), pp. 42, 60.

